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# The Fine Arts in the Education of the People

BY P. P. CLAXTON.

(From an address before the College Art Association of America in Convention at Washington, D. C., March 25, 1921.)

"Art is the flowering of the spiritual life of the people." It comes out of the heart and soul of the people. We are told that this is a scientific age. Our schools and colleges advocate the study of the concrete. Art, on the other hand, is not concrete, despite the fact that the concrete critical study of art is what seems to be most emphasized. The power of criticism will not make the artist. There is a grave defect in any art education which consists only in commenting, as has been the case very largely in all schools and colleges. Moreover, these institutions have hesitated and frequently refused to credit the study of art. A people may be scientifically well educated, intellectually well educated, yet they may remain spiritually illiterate. Art, if I understand it, depends upon feeling, not upon knowledge. Art comes out of the response of the emotions to the things about one; then, when an expression is formed, external knowledge begins to play a part.

It seems to me that all of the arts come out of the same root. They are developed under the same emotional condition. I do not believe it is possible to form any appreciation of art successfully unless you promote the whole thing out of which art comes.

At your meeting in Cleveland last year I spoke to you for about twenty-five minutes, but I enjoyed much more watching you in action. After the formal meeting, we went to a luncheon where, under the influence of convivial intimacy, a good many persons made confessions. I wonder if you remember some of these confessions. As I recall, one gentleman asked, "How is it that we do not make more progress?" Another one said, "It is very delightful to

meet year after year the same people, but where are we going?" Now, as an educator, in my own mind echoes the same question. It seems to me that we do not make the progress that we should. And going home from that meeting on the train, I thought it out, and, I believe, found the solution.

It is impossible to promote any one of the arts alone. Every great artist has been great not only in his particular art but also in his conception of the whole field of art. Goethe was not only great as a poet, but was equally proficient as a dramatist, and master of ceremonies. You know the story much better than I do. Those who have been great have not only utilized their powers in their one particular field but have also ventured into other branches of art, where they have been far more than dilettanti. It has been true in the past that those who have attained greatness in one thing have reached eminence in others. Today we try to cultivate the arts separately. That is probably the reason for our shortcomings. We are stifling art in itself, and we must find a method of broadening our scope. How can this be brought about? I am not an artist; I have little or no artistic expression in any line but I have a little art appreciation, and I feel that this true appreciation for it is in harmony with things as they are. And art should harmonize with truth, for do we not learn that the beautiful, the true, and the good are one? I name the three in this order though it is customary for symmetry or euphony to say the true, the beautiful, and the good. But the beautiful is primary: it has reference to the things which appeal to the senses. Truth, on the other hand, deals with matters of the intellect. And the good has to do with questions of action, of moral character, and the rest.

By the time I reached home, I had worked the problem out like this. There is need in this country of bringing together a few people who represent the fine arts. I speak of the fine arts because it is the promotion of them that I have had in mind. There should be brought together a few of the practitioners of the arts of painting, of sculpture, of architecture, of music, of drama, of poetry, of pageantry and ceremonies, because all of these arise from the same source, and each is related to the other. We

should bring together representatives of highest rank in these respective lines, a few actors, editors, artists; and to the same place should be invited men and women like yourselves from institutions of higher learning, some representatives of the secondary schools, and then some practical school administrators. They should come together at some place where they would not be in a hurry, at some good winter or summer resort place where there is not a crowd. And they should come without a program that can drive them. I believe art never comes out of a hurry. It never grows in haste; it takes time. It has to sink in; it appeals to the leisure of life and not to the bustle. We have to be quiet to see the beautiful tints of color, to hear the harmonious tones of music, and to enjoy the figments of the imagination.

I believe that a group of seventy coming together at some such place for a week, or ten days, or for two full weeks, would be best. If there were a great organ there it would be better still. If in a beautiful building, it would be more inspiring. If it were near the sea or mountains, it would be advantageous, too. These people should come together for the ten days with a program of two or three hours in the morning and with nothing to do for the rest of the day but to talk about the problem of the fine arts and to consider how they can be promoted. I believe out of this thing something might grow of great value. I would have no place there, but I would like to be there, just to drink it in.

I have tried to think out lists of suitable people, but I have found it impossible to confine myself to one list. The gathering would have to be made up of representatives of each of the seven fine arts. That would mean two or three or four teachers of art in the higher institutions, and a few from the secondary schools, because beginnings are made at the beginning. It would mean about a dozen practical educators: probably a college president or two, not art teachers, and some superintendents, and others. One of the things that would come out of it would not be the disturbance of the organization here, nor would it mean that you would discontinue to meet; but it would mean that every year there would be a meeting of all interested in the problem of the fine arts.

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If Maecenas still lives, or his successor, we might receive an invitation from someone who has a summer resort, at some such place as Lake Mohonk. We have had an invitation to Michigan Union, at the University of Michigan. I have been working on it for nearly a year. I have talked with President Burton. He was immensely interested and it appealed to him at once. If it should appeal to you, I would be glad if you would try to bring about a union sometime soon. All art is one when we arrive at the spirit of it all. Then we shall expect naturally a very ripe fruitage of it.